

Quality of Life at CIA

Few government agencies have the good fortune to be located in a rural, woodland setting such as ours. The Northern Virginia countryside is noted for its beauty, and the George Washington Parkway is one of the area's most scenic drives. Here the seasons pass close at hand; the crackling gold of autumn and the budding green of spring surround the nearby Potomac, and the intense heat of summer and ice of winter press hard on the building and grounds.

For the Headquarters employee these are a part of life, part of an atmosphere that is unique to the Agency and unparalleled in official Washington. The care and tastefulness that governed the site selection and design of the building are obvious to visitor and employee alike. The Parkway on one side and Dolly Madison Highway on the other serve the two entrances, yet no traffic can be seen or heard from the grounds. Carefully trimmed grass and trees border roadways that curve easily through the compound with a minimum of corners or signs. Planting of shrubs and flowers, professionally designed and tended, provide changing vistas year-round. Even a nature walk wends its way quietly through one of the wooded areas for those who prefer a closer touch with the untrimmed and untrammelled.

The Headquarters Building, designed by Harrison and Abramowitz and completed in 1959, spreads through these surroundings with stark simplicity. The repeating lines of the aggregate-framed windows set into reinforced concrete are broken, only by the cantilevered portico at the front and the low arches of the cafeteria in back. The broad expanse of the building face sits comfortably on the enlarged first floor, which undulates into the garden area.

Natural light enters offices not only along the facade but through three major courtyards, providing a maximum of exterior rooms. The floor-to-ceiling windows of the cafeteria allow unbroken views of the surrounding landscape.

Inside the building, the size and spaciousness of the exterior setting is immediately obvious in the design of the front hall, where the glass doors of the entrance face the central courtyard windows. The corridors surrounding the courtyard have been hung with a series of oil portraits of former directors and a selection of Washington Color School art generously loaned by Mr. Vincent Melzac, a noted collector. These are placed to take best advantage of the natural light from the inner windows.

In addition to the artwork in these corridors, the 1D Corridor serves as a permanent display area for a rotating series of shows and collections. These are loaned by organizations such as the Smithsonian, as well as by individual employees. The annual exhibit of employee art is shown here.

An interesting decor surrounds each of the first floor elevator wells. Due largely to employee effort, early maps of Rome, London, St. Petersburg-Leningrad, and Paris have been enlarged and mounted on these walls. Also, each level of many stairwells is marked with murals of different language numerals. For those interested, the languages, starting from the first floor, are: Cambodian, Amharic, Arabic, pseudo-French, Cyrillic, Mandarin and Thai.

Bulletin boards and showcases of announcements and awards are placed in the hallway around the public service area of the first floor. Additional displays of posters are carefully limited to specific units in entries and elevator areas.

The Work Environment

Those familiar with the Headquarters Building are well aware of the great variety of style and decor with which Agency personnel surround themselves. They are also aware of the difficulties involved in creating a pleasant environment in what are often crowded conditions. While it is impossible to address the specifics of each work area, there are certain tips that can contribute much to improving the space we have.

The predominant features of the building design that the arrangement of each office should reflect are those of clean lines and open space. Because many rooms and work areas are small, it is most important that they be free from clutter.

Space

The first step toward designing the best work environment is to make a critical inventory of the furniture, eliminating all but the most necessary. Passageways can be cleared, bookcases cleaned out of outdated or unused material and file and safetops cleared of unnecessary items.

Walls

A common office practice is to hang papers on walls and partitions where they provide ready reference. Although this is often necessary information, the result can be chaos. To the maximum extent possible, these papers should be removed and consolidated into readily available notebooks. This step by itself can give the perception of added space and restful surroundings.

Wall Art

A limited supply of wall hangings decorate most office areas. Employees can provide a wealth of variety and interest by supplementing these with their own reproductions or originals. A tasteful collection of these, carefully hung, can add an element of depth and personality to otherwise sterile surroundings.

Plants

Unlike furniture or posted notices, an office rarely has too many plants. They add warmth to large and small rooms alike and are inexpensive to buy and maintain. Most house plants will thrive under fluorescent lights and few, if any, need a green thumb to survive. They are a sure way to provide color and depth. However, for the most part plants must be supplied and cared for by employees, and caution must be exercised when watering them.

The building and grounds of CIA represent the same quality and professionalism as do the employees. Each office space can and should reflect those same standards. The use of open space, clean lines and tasteful, imaginative decoration can add new dimensions to the atmosphere of our work environment.

Headquarters Expansion

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls has designed the new building to preserve the wooded environment and to maintain the presence of the existing building as the Headquarters entrance. It will be

built into the hillside west of the existing cafeteria and will consist of two low towers connected by an atrium. The office towers will be constructed with horizontally and vertically divided green tinted glass curtain walls designed to be compatible with the existing Headquarters facade. The atrium will contain an employee services concourse.

The design of the courtyard space between the two buildings preserves the existing large trees near the cafeteria, and additional plantings, park benches, tables, and pathways will make this a desirable space for employees use. This courtyard will also provide a pleasant view from the atrium of the new building as well as from the existing cafeteria.